

THE FRENCH ADMINISTRATION OF INDO-CHINA

France's interest in the Far East, like her whole colonial policy, was made up of contradictions. A sentimental role as protector of foreign missions, particularly in China, was inherited from the Empire by the anti-clerical Third Republic, at the same time as an aggressive determination to share in England's trade profits and possessions there. France's situation in Europe, as well as her educational background, made for an indifference to Far Eastern affairs. The exotic tradition, however, had long looked upon the Orient as a continent filled with laborious peoples and great resources that offered remedies for aU Europe's social ills. The surprising conquest of Saigon permitted many of these latent dreams to be fulfilled. Saigon would become a great port that would not only shelter the fleet in time of distress, but radiate French cultural and religious influence throughout the Far East. A fevered searching for a back door to China placed new importance on their acquisition and a new bitterness into Anglo-French rivalry.

England

England's alliance with Japan, and her activity in Siam and Burma, were aU causes for alarm. She had long been seeking a trade route between India and Burma so as to cut down the distance between Shanghai and European markets. Moreover, Russia's intrigues and expansion in Asia caused great uneasiness. Three routes were possible: of these Assam seemed the most likely, but explorations soon proved the obstacles to be insurmountable. Another road lay between Rangoon and Yunnan through Szemao, but the extent and unhealthiness of those regions and the natural drawbacks offset the lack of political

complications that such a route would encounter. This road was care-
Mly studied in 1866, but abandoned because public interest had been aroused in favour of the Bhamo road to Taly. In 1868 exploration was started from both ends, but the murder of one member of the party, as well as the current Moslem revolt in Yunnan, led to the virtual abandonment of this idea. Although natural obstacles and local warfare were responsible for giving France a free hand in the Tonkin route, nevertheless relations with Eisgland remained strained for a number of years. About thirty years ago, Indo-CMna welcomed to Saigon a Bunnese prince who sought the throne of his country, then timber English control, and the English returned the compleat fay harbouring at Singapore Prince lukanthor, the recalcitrant heir to the Cambodian throne. It was the fear that England would acquire the Hoegay coal mines that determined the vadUatmg French